

International training of a property elite

The companies that have the most expert employees will be the most successful. Most people would now agree on this. Someone who takes it with particular seriousness is Roger Akelius. He has set up Akelius University to provide international training of managers by managers, based on actual cases in the property field.

The policy of Akelius Fastigheter is to be the European property company that has the most employees with advanced relevant training. This may sound like a tough challenge, but Roger Akelius has already got the project under way. And this at a time when many other companies are cutting back on skills training, with financial worries as the main explanation. Back in April last year Roger Akelius told the employees of Akelius Fastigheter at a staff conference in Berlin that during the coming recession (the one now happening), some fifty of them would be offered further education equivalent to an MBA (Master of Business Administration) in property, concentrating on rented housing. The course takes 18 months and is held entirely in English, with lectures

and study in four different countries. The course started in 2008 in Cyprus and 30 people took part there, all with several years' advanced work experience in rental property. Nearly half of them come from Akelius's German operation.

WHEN AKELIUS UNIVERSITY'S COURSE MOVED on to Florida in January, we at Fastighetssverige decided to go there to see it with our own eyes.

Out there in Florida we met Roger Akelius at the Wyndham Palm Air conference hotel where the course was taking place between January 19 and 29. He had just taken part in one of the scheduled seminars, this one a financial report about Akelius



A UNIQUE INITIATIVE. This is the first group to undergo training at Akelius University. There are people from Sweden, Germany, Cyprus and the Bahamas, all with several years' advanced work experience in the property industry. In August it will be time for them to sit their final examination, but before that they will have a hard week in Haparanda.

Apartment Ltd. Earlier in the day there had been another seminar about housing for the elderly.

ROGER IS IN REMARKABLY GOOD HUMOUR and appears extremely vigorous as he explains the background of Akelius University to us.

– I am known for coming up with rather odd business ideas, of course. My problem is that I often think back to front, but my advantage is that I have the means to try things. I got the idea for Akelius University after wondering for a long time how I could

FACTS: AKELIUS FASTIGHETER

Akelius Fastigheter AB is the largest private residential property owner in Sweden, owning 38,500 tenancy rights with a market value of 31 billion kronor. Its owner is Akelius University Foundation. The company owns tenancy rights in some forty Swedish towns and in ten towns in Germany. The Group CEO is Jan-Erik Höjvall. The Managing Director in Sweden is Lars Lindfors and the Managing Director in Germany is Pål Ahlsén. The first properties were bought in 1994. The company also owns a substantial stock of housing for the elderly. The company has 150 employees and annual rental income of 2.6 billion Swedish kronor.

best run some kind of charitable project. These speculations led on to the Akelius University Foundation, which is now the parent company of Akelius Apartment Ltd, which in turn owns Akelius Fastigheter, says Roger Akelius.

So, as top of the hierarchy at Akelius Fastigheter he has set up a foundation with the express aim of sharing out part of the profits from the properties as scholarship awards to pay for education at Akelius University.

IN THE CONFERENCE HALL ARE some thirty students from Sweden, Germany, Cyprus and the Bahamas fully focused on an investment task. Outside the Florida sun shines warmly but the group project runs on to 7 pm, by which time the sun has long set. However no one seems concerned about that: people are simply not here for a holiday but to advance themselves. A short while later Roger Akelius mounts the stage and talks a little about the company's position and the aim of the course and what people can expect. Later he tells us too about the future plans for Akelius University.

– This first time we ran the course with our own staff, but as early as next year experienced people from similar property com- ☒



AKELIUS UNIVERSITY. Roger Akelius participates quite a lot during the education. Here he gives a lecture at Wyundham Palm Air in Florida.

panies all over Europe will be taking part. And our intention is that everyone who meets the criteria should be able to apply for a scholarship to go on the course, Roger Akelius says.

HE EXPRESSES HIMSELF IN A WAY that makes people understand that profits in themselves are not the central aim here, but that Roger Akelius is driven more by a strong determination to make an impact – in short to be of help. Today Akelius Fastigheter owns properties with an estimated market value of 31 billion kronor, and the difference between the market value of assets and liabilities in Akelius Fastigheter, disregarding deferred tax, is approximately ten billion kronor.

– I have worked with various charitable bodies for much of my life, and I felt now that I wanted to do something useful with the profits from Akelius Fastigheter – and you can't just give away capital on such a large scale. Nor did I want to force children of several generations to become property tycoons. I have therefore created a foundation with precise rules, he says.

– But obviously there is an ulterior incentive to safeguard future expertise in the company, Roger Akelius adds. An employee with deepened knowledge and experience can come up with better ideas which are both progressive and income-generating.

– Skills are becoming more and more important. If my colleagues can reduce costs by just one per cent, that represents large sums. This training course equates to one per cent of the company's costs this year. Nor should you forget the value of committed staff: it is enthusiastic employees who carry the company forward, he says.

IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM Sten-Åke Danielsson, investment expert and fund manager at Danske Bank, has now taken the stage. He is one of the many lecturers called up for the course. In excellent English he talks about the recent turbulence in the world's financial markets and what we can expect in the future.

The training course itself focuses on oral and written communication, always in English. During every seminar on the course

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each pupil must make a presentation in English. And the exercises do not use made-up projects, but real places and authentic transactions all the way through. To help with the oral presentations, professional actors have been hired to train the pupils in public speaking and how to put across their message from the stage.

IN APRIL THE COURSE MOVES about as far north as you can go, Haparanda, on the Swedish/Finnish border just south of the Arctic Circle. And then at the end of August it will be time for the first group to graduate from Akelius University. This will take place in Stockholm to coincide with a Board meeting and presentations of the pupils' papers.

We ask Roger Akelius just why it was Akelius Fastigheter that was first with this type of initiative.

– Perhaps we look a little further ahead than many other companies. Everything we take on we do with at least a 20-year outlook, and in this way we are perhaps rather unique. But I hope to be able to collaborate with several property companies, and that more will copy the idea. On my side there is no sense of competition at all in this, he says.

But why are you doing it at this particular time?

– We have the means at the moment. Our funds are healthy. Some companies are finding it harder and have to save.”

What is your goal for Akelius University looking ten years ahead?

– That we should have between 3,000 and 5,000 pupils each year from all over the world. 

FACTS: AFTER THE COURSE PUPILS ARE EXPECTED TO BE ABLE TO:

- Assess financial reports
- Buy and sell properties
- Carry out a Due Diligence
- Calculate property values
- Understand how population movements affect property values over a ten-year period
- Prepare maintenance plans and understand the returns from different measures
- Find the right tenants quickly
- Minimise vacancy rate
- Market the company via the web, brochures and orally
- In English, use the right specialist terms, have an advanced vocabulary, deliver speeches and write material that is easy to read.

Test your knowledges at: <http://university.akelius.de/library>